

Mickey and Dick Schwary

Father and son team have done much to promote local business community

By CRAIG CLOHESSY
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The Schwary family has long had a positive impact on the modern business community of Camas-Washougal.

Always looking for new endeavors, Dick Schwary continues the family tradition of entrepreneurship—a road his father started down when this century was just in its teens.

Michael "Mickey" Schwary, Dick's father, was known by many as an intelligent businessman—someone willing to try new things if the results offered promise.

The family first came to Oregon in about 1917 and settled in the Parkrose area of what is now Portland. Mickey and his bride Hazel started a grocery store, taking orders and delivering them by horseback.

They sold the store in Parkrose and purchased a new grocery in downtown Camas. The concept of meats, produce and variety under one roof, drew in numerous customers. The year was 1927 and the common way of conducting transactions was by credit. The Depression made paying grocery bills tough for many, Dick said, so his parents settled up with customers in a variety of fashions.

"Many times when people got to a point they couldn't pay, mom would go out to collect—she might get a couple of chickens," he said. "Some contributed labor and helped build my parent's house."

Dick noted that after the Depression and World War II, charging groceries started fading away and most paid by cash.

After the war, Mickey Schwary sold the downtown store and opened up a couple other stores in the area. He sold those somewhere around 1946 and purchased land in what is now known as the One-Stop area. The land, then little more than cow fields, would soon be the site for one of the most modern shopping centers in the Northwest.

Around 1947, Mickey Schwary began construction of the One-Stop Shopping Center. Dick said bankers told his dad that the concept wouldn't work. It was the common belief at the time that the only way retail-oriented business could make it was with plenty of foot traffic.

Mickey Schwary patterned his new center after similar locations springing up in California. The concept was offering numerous operations in one center, accessible by car.

The One-Stop Shopping Center opened with great fan-fare and had little trouble attracting numerous businesses to coincide with the Schwarys' grocery store in the center of the complex. Mickey Schwary would remain an active member in the business community until his death in 1984.

During the early days of the One-Stop Shopping Center, Dick Schwary was beginning to find his own way in the business

world. He graduated from Camas High School in 1948 and enrolled at the University of Portland, transferring to the University of Oregon where he earned a bachelor's degree in 1952. He then continued on in his education receiving a master of science degree in retailing from New York University in 1953.

While business was to prove to be his career, Dick Schwary's passion was in music. He started performing around the area with the "Dick Schwary Big Band" in 1949. The 1940s and early '50s was the hey-day for big bands, and Schwary's group quickly came into demand in the greater Portland/Vancouver area. He continues to perform to this day—sometimes with larger groups locally and other times catching on with a group during his business travels.

"Music has always been an enjoyment for me, a way to relax," he said. "It's like golf is for other people."

In business, Schwary was continually finding new endeavors that challenged his desire to "organize." Up until the end of the '50s Schwary managed the Schwary Super Market in the One-Stop. He then took on the duties of manager of a Columbia Big Supermarket, while serving as public relations representative for the One-Stop Shopping Center.

From 1960-64 Schwary was co-owner of the One-Stop TV and Appliance Store. He sold his interest in that business and subsequently opened the One-Stop Western Auto Store, which he kept until 1968.

Looking for new challenges, Schwary started considering a different kind of business—the banking business. He helped organize efforts to bring a new bank to the area. Opening up a bank required jumping through a number of state hoops. The experience taught Schwary a great deal about the value of personal contact and face-to-face dealing with government officials.

"If they remember your face, then they are a lot more willing to do things for you. They are faced with requests all the time and it's easy to get lost in the paperwork," he said. "If they recognize you, sometimes the paperwork finds its way to the top a little faster."

The then Washington State Bank opened in 1970 and Schwary served as chairman of the board until 1980.

Never one to be involved in just one project, Schwary during this time was also active in the rental market. He built some rental properties and constructed the Brass Lamp Motor Inn, which he owned and operated until 1989.

With the knowledge he gained from the banking business, Schwary and a group of investors started looking at the possibility of starting up a low-power television station to be based in Vancouver.

Once again the process required jumping through a number of hoops, but this time at the federal level. The efforts paid off. Schwary and his fellow investors opened KLRK Broadcasting Corp., now KPDX-Channel 49, in 1979. Schwary served in the capacity of president of the corporation until selling his interest in the business in 1982.

It wasn't too many years before Schwary started working again on another challenge—this time opening a radio station in his own hometown of Camas. Schwary gained FCC approval in 1991 for the station, based out of Camas and Gresham, Ore., which is



DICK SCHWARY



THE OPENING of the One-Stop Shopping Center was a big day for the Schwarys and the Camas-Washougal community.

currently broadcasting on both the AM and FM frequencies.

The Camas station, KMUZ-FM, plays a mix of easy listening contemporary music, while the Gresham station, KKBK-AM or "K-BACH," plays classical music.

Schwary said both operations are experiencing growing success and offer a great

deal of promise for the future.

He continues to stay involved in the station, and of course, a variety of other business interests.

All-in-all, the Schwary name is likely to go down in the history books of Camas-Washougal as significant players in the area's business community.